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ABSTRACT

Phenomenology, a constantly renewed effort to see the world in a nonreductive and originative way, is useful in bringing about radical reflection on the phenomenon of communication as a human science. A human science is both a scientific and a humanistic endeavor; it is necessary to return to the phenomena under investigation and to permit them to guide methodological designs to guard against the primacy and absolutization of method. The human sciences must be kept from being severed from their prescientific origins in the concrete life-world of experience. Among human sciences, communication enjoys a favored position to maintain its grasp on the human point of view. The common ground of philosophy and communication science is communicative behavior as this finds its point of origin in the concrete dialogic encounter. Through the dialectical interchange between partners in a communication, shared meanings are produced. Meaning comes to presence in the world in the event of an undivided concreteness of one self with another. Winning arguments and collecting information are secondary to the function of language on the originative level as an object to which conversational partners are directed, considering the weight of one another's opinion. (DF)

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON COMMUNICATION

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The philosophy of communication is a relatively new discipline. To be sure, philosophers since the time of Socrates have had things to say about communication, and rhetoricians and speech scientists have often dealt with matters philosophical. But we now seem to have reached a stage in the development of the republic of human knowledge in which philosophers and communication scientists are seeing the relation between philosophy and communication as a reciprocating interface and not simply an adventitious juxtaposition. There is increasing interest in the philosophy of communication as a joint venture informed by shared insights and common concerns. The possibilities of such a joint venture are intriguing; the challenges that it presents are demanding and formidable.

I will first approach the issue of the interface of philosophy and communication on a very general level of inquiry, raising some questions about the project itself. With respect to its status as a discipline philosophy is usually classified as a humanistic study. Historically it has found its place in the curriculum under the rubric of "the humanities". The study of human communication, at least in the modern-day university, is one of the special human sciences (along with psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, etc.), whose designated home is usually in a school or division of social science.

We are brought together because of our mutual interest in philosophy and communication. We are interested in some way relating philosophy to this special human science so as to work out a "philosophy of communication". How does it stand with these two disciplines in this joint venture, and where

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does one stand as one looks for a possible point of intersection where these two disciplines meet? Do we look for a common methodology? Do we look for similar conceptual constructs? Do we look for a common goal? Do we look for an architectonic principle of unification? Where do we find that common ground or that shared concern on which or around which we might establish a fraternity of philosophers and communication scientists? What is it that is at issue in a so-called "philosophy of communication"?

Now speaking as a member of the philosophical community it would appear that I am in a position--at least for twenty-five minutes--to call the shots as it were. I could use my time to mark out the terrain to be explored by erecting philosophical sign posts--posing questions in such a manner that any possible answer would have to be in the genre of philosophical discourse. And as I am sure many of you know, philosophers are notorious for doing precisely that when they address their sister disciplines. Indeed, I fear that there is a rather long-standing tradition for such behavior, and it has found a peculiar sanction in the history of modern philosophy since the time of Descartes. Descartes in his celebrated metaphor of the tree of knowledge conferred upon philosophy a rather pretentious privilege. The roots symbolize metaphysics; the trunk corresponds to physics; and the branches stand for the specialized sciences. The responsibility that this metaphor gives over to the discipline of philosophy (specifically metaphysics) is staggering. It is also, in my view, misplaced. What is suggested by this metaphor is that the proper ordination of philosophy in relation to the special sciences is that philosophy provides the unimpeachable foundations for their specific methodologies and conceptual designs. It were as though the philosopher, analogous to the Greyhound bus driver in the popular TV commercial, were to say to his colleagues in the sciences: "Leave the thinking to us!"

I want to argue that such an ordination in the continuum of philosophical and scientific knowledge, for reasons both internal and external to philosophy, is quite simply wrongheaded, and that a different framework of inquiry is required if the issue at hand is to be productively pursued. Let us name this new framework of inquiry the standpoint of radical phenomenological reflection--and this now brings us closer to the designated topic of my presentation: "A Phenomenological Perspective on Communication".

Phenomenology, not surprisingly, has come to mean many things to many people. This is of course true not only of phenomenology but of any movement or style of thought that tends toward institutionalization--be it rationalism, empiricism, pragmatism, positivism or what have you. Although phenomenological attitudes, procedures and concepts can be found quite early in the history of Western philosophy, it is to Edmund Husserl that one must give the credit for most systematically formulating the procedures and principles of what generally flies under the flag of phenomenological philosophy. Since the time of Husserl, however, different varieties of phenomenological reflection have appeared. Husserl's program, at least during the classical period of his thought, was defined in terms of a transcendental phenomenological idealism. His student and successor, Martin Heidegger, took the liberty to recast Husserl's program into a project of phenomenological ontology that sets its sights on an originary understanding of Being. Across the border in France, Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and later Paul Ricoeur, provided phenomenology with further modifications and refinements. In the thought of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, which was nourished by French existentialism, phenomenology takes shape as existential phenomenology. Ricoeur was chiefly responsible for marking out the directions of what today is known as hermeneutical phenomenology. And Hans-Georg Gadamer grafted hermeneutics, dialectics and

phenomenology in such a manner as to produce a rather impressive dialectical phenomenology of the human sciences. So phenomenology does not display a seamless web of concerns, attitudes, procedures and concepts. Indeed, I would suggest that it is of the very nature of phenomenology that such should be the case. Phenomenology is not a set of doctrinal claims, fixed within a uniform conceptual scheme. It is rather a constantly renewed effort to see the world in a non-reductive and originaive way.

Clearly my own phenomenological perspective has been inspired and informed by the contributions of the above referenced continental philosophers. But also I have learned much from that veritable genius of concrete philosophical reflection and elucidation, the American philosopher William James, with whom I have for some time carried on a dialogue in working out my own version of phenomenology as radical reflection.¹ James' contribution toward delivering an originaive view of the world-as-experienced should not be underestimated.

Given this very brief account of where I come from, I must now tell you where I am going with the topic at hand. In the first stage of my project I will use the resources of radical phenomenological reflection to think to the "end of philosophy". Now by the "end" of philosophy I do not mean its displacement or simple termination (after all, I don't want to find myself without a job!). Nor do I mean by end what is understood within a Hegelian perspective--namely, the fulfillment of philosophy through a dialectical mediation of pure thought. I mean rather a thinking beyond philosophy to its origin, and more specifically its origin in a concrete life-world of human concerns, thought, action, language and communication, as these antedate formal philosophical reflection itself. It might be said that I am here following that sound advice already given by Ludwig Feuerbach: "Do

not wish to be a philosopher at the expense of being a man". To put the matter in another way, our project of radical reflection is a project of deconstruction. Radical reflection drives to a deconstruction or dismantling of formal conceptual constructs (both methodological and metaphysical) so as to bring to light the fabric and features of our lived-experience in its simultaneous encounter of a world of nature and a world of other selves. Some of you will recognize in this move an appeal to a common and much discussed notion in the phenomenological literature--the notion of the Lebenswelt (life-world), which Husserl used rather extensively in his later philosophy. However, even before the institution of this notion in continental thought, William James had already called our attention to the sought-for phenomenon in his explication of "the world as experienced". Writing in his Essays on Radical Empiricism James calls our attention to the light at the end of the philosophical tunnel:

The individualized self, which I believe to be the only thing properly called self, is a part of the content of the world experienced. The world experienced (otherwise called the "field of consciousness") comes at all times with our body as its centre, centre of vision, centre of action, centre of interest.

Throughout his Essays on Radical Empiricism James offers seminal suggestions which we find helpful in defining the goal of our project of deconstruction--a recovery of the world as experienced with the concrete, embodied, acting and social experiencer as its center. Radical phenomenological reflection is not a drive to an all encompassing, architectonic system of knowledge. Such a drive defined classical metaphysical speculation. Radical reflection marks out a different path, leading to the province of proto-philosophy. This is why the reflection at issue is radical. It goes beyond formal philosophical reflection, which continues to work with epistemological

and metaphysical concepts and models. Radical reflection requires a critical suspension of the project of philosophy itself.

We have spoken of this radical reflection as being phenomenological. Now one of the significations of the adjective can be clarified. In defining his program of phenomenological philosophy Husserl emphasized the importance --indeed necessity--of the performance of the epoche. The Greek term, epoche, means "to suspend", "to bracket", "to put out of play". More specifically, what Husserl required of the epoche was a suspension of the world of the natural attitude so as to lead us back to the standpoint of transcendental subjectivity from which the constitution of meanings in philosophically reflective life proceeds. What I am proposing today is a radicalization of Husserl's application of the epoche. Husserl's understanding and use of the epoche needs to be radicalized because it still proceeds within the framework of explicit philosophical interests and constructions, indeed ultimately of a transcendental idealistic sort. In our more radical application of the epoche we deconstruct the very framework of philosophical inquiry--even of phenomenological philosophy--so as to bring to light the proto-philosophical region of origin. The principles and procedures of phenomenological philosophy need to be used against itself.

Accompanying our radicalization of the phenomenological epoche is our radicalization of the meaning of "phenomenon". Quite straightforwardly taken over from the Greek, "phainomenon", the English term "phenomenon" means "that which shows itself". In Husserl's phenomenology this notion of phenomenon becomes formalized as a datum for transcendental consciousness. In our project of radical reflection this formal notion of phenomenon is deformed. Before that which shows itself becomes a datum for transcendental consciousness it surges up in a proto-philosophical, Jamsian world of intercalating thought

and action, feeling and purpose, speech and communication. The return to the origins brings us to an originative phenomenon--not abstracted "objects-as-meant", intended by an equally abstracted consciousness (these are relatively late arrivals), but the world as we live through it in our quotidian existence.

Now what does this project of radical phenomenological reflection have to do with the question of the interface of philosophy and communication--which is the issue at hand? I want to argue that it has a great deal to do with this issue, for it is only through an application of such radical reflection that an interface of these disciplines becomes possible. To effect such an interface we have to carry through a radical reflection in the republic of the human sciences in the way that we have suggested that it needs to be done in the domain of formal philosophy.

To even the casual observer of the ~~science~~^{scene} it must be apparent that all is not well in the republic of the human sciences. The current proliferating sciences of man have gravitated into a situation of crisis--a crisis of competing methodologies, conflicting conceptual constructs, and a confusion of goals. Two contemporary French philosophers, writing on the issue, have addressed the matter at hand with a certain measure of candor. Georges Gusdorf in his provocative article, "The Ambiguity of the Sciences of Man", concludes that "We need only to consider the present state of the human sciences to ascertain that they are in complete confusion".³ His fellow countryman, Paul Ricoeur, echoes the same sentiment when he says, "The sciences of man are dispersed into separate disciplines and literally do not know what they are talking about".⁴

This is not the occasion to carry through a detailed analysis of the multiple facets of this crisis of the human sciences in contemporary culture.

We can only adumbrate the source of the crisis, which is not at all unlike the source of the crisis in formal philosophy. In both cases the crisis is occasioned by a loss of reflexivity upon origins, which alone can be reclaimed through a project of radical reflection. It is thus that the need for a radical reflection, in the domains both of formal philosophy and the human sciences, is one of the most urgent requirements of our time.

In the case of the human sciences we seem to be confronted with a special problem. There appears to be an intrinsic ambiguity in the very project of a "human science" or a "science of man", an ambiguity that trades on the long-standing distinction between the province of the humanities and the province of the sciences--a distinction that became popularized a few decades ago through the writings of C.P. Snow and his much discussed theory of the "two cultures". A human science--be it psychology, sociology or the science of communication--is both a scientific and a humanistic endeavor. Its subject matter is certainly in the domain of humanitas. A human science is a study of human behavior. It is at this juncture that certain ambiguities in the meaning of "science" come to the surface. Is the meaning of science for the human sciences simply borrowed from the physical sciences and then translated into a set of methodological procedures--(which was the dream of positivism)? Those of us who have been awakened from this dream are too consciously aware of our waking life realities that resist this easy transposition of methodological procedures. Somewhere on the bottom line in pursuing this issue we need to return to the phenomena, and permit the phenomena under investigation to guide our methodological designs.

Our colleagues in the physical sciences enjoy a certain immunity to the perplexities that beset the human or social scientist. In the physical sciences the phenomena under investigation--electrons, protons, chemical

agents, etc.--are amenable to controlled observation and experimentation because they are non-intentional realities or events. Electrons and protons do not display self-understanding; they do not endow their movements with meaning or significance. But the human sciences study the behavior of human actors, and these human actors are always in process of endowing their varied activities, their embodiment, and their social postures with meaning. Before they become controlled objects for investigation, they are subjects in a prescientific and precategorical life-world, in which taken for granted meanings and interpretations are always already at work. They already understand themselves and their world through a preconceptual and preobjective understanding. There is, if you will, a hermeneutic of everyday life that antedates the methodological designs and conceptual constructs of the human scientist who proposes to undertake the study of human behavior.

The implications of this for a self-consciousness of method are far-reaching. It provides a corrective, a kind of sheet-anchor against any primacy and absolutization of method--what Dr. Rollo May in one of his writings has so suggestively referred to as "methodolatry". Such a methodolatry selects the data to fit the methodological design; treats as an object that which is ever a subject; and thus conceals the originary phenomenon, which somewhat ironically, is precisely that which needs to be investigated and examined. It is thus that a performance of a radical reflection of the sort that we have articulated becomes a continuing requirement for any human science. It provides if you will a regulative principle that keeps the human science in question from being severed from its prescientific origins in the concrete life-world.

Now it would appear to us that there is at least one sense in which the science of human communication, one of the more recent human sciences, is in

a privileged position to stage a return to the dynamics of lived-through experience. Attending to the phenomenon of human communication, communication science is able to retain a more explicit liason with the concrete world of praxis. It is not so prone to abstract the subject from the dynamics of world experience and reify its behavior into a set of observable, quantifiable, external behavioral traits (the temptation of psychology); nor does it so easily succumb to the tendency of abstracting the objectifiable social complex of institutions and rules from the concrete intersubjectivity of the engaged actor (the temptation of sociology). Admittedly, human communication science, like any other human science and like formal philosophy itself, will need to be wary of the Scylla of a reifying rationalism and the Charybdis of an abstract empiricism. But it is more in position to maintain its grasp on what we might call the human point of view. It is less prone to give in to that most tempting of all fallacies, which Alfred North Whitehead so perceptively named, "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness".

It is at this juncture that philosophy (and more specifically a phenomenology of the experienced life-world) and communication science reach common ground. This common ground is the communicative behavior of man as this communicative behavior finds its point of origin in the concrete dialogic encounter. It is not accidental that this happy discovery of a common ground is at the same time a recovery of the role of Socratic dialectics. Dialectics, as Socrates had already recognized, provides both the dynamics and structure of the dialogic encounter. It is through the dialectical interchange by the partners in a conversation that meaning is co-constituted. The dialectic of dialogue conspires to produce shared meanings. In the concrete dialogic encounter the episodical histories of the self and the other have not yet congealed into sedimented givens. There is no self as subject standing over

against the other as object. There is rather the event of an undivided concreteness of self-with-other and it is through this event that meaning comes to presense in the world. It is in dialogue that the word takes on flesh and dwells among us.

It is important to remember that the elan of this concrete dialectic in originative experience is not the passion for winning an argument nor is it the appetite for the collection of information. The techniques of argumentation and information gathering are derivative forms of speech and language. Language on the originative level functions not as a vehicle for winning arguments or conveying information--although it surely can be used in these capacities--but rather is the event of clearing and setting-forth in which, as Dr. Thayer puts it, "saying and being are two aspects of the same thing", disclosed through the consummate reciprocity of the dialogic encounter. This consummate reciprocity of dialectical interchange takes the form of a logic of questioning that proceeds not via a serialization of propositional protocols but through the being of the phenomena--that which shows itself through a gradual unfolding in the dynamics of conversation. Hans Georg Gadamer, in his very influential book, Truth and Method, has articulated this intimate connection between dialectics and the logic of questioning. "The art of questioning is that of being able to go on asking questions, i.e. the art of thinking. It is called 'dialectic', for it is the art of conducting a real conversation. To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion"⁵.

Our project of deconstruction, applied both to formal philosophy and

the human sciences, has led us to a common prephilosophical and prescientific point of origin. It is important to recognize that this common ground appears on the side of origins rather than on the side of achieved philosophical or scientific results, which was the ideal of the unity of the sciences movement during the period of positivism. The unifying ideal of positivism was a common methodology, which set the stage for a sequence of reductionisms culminating in the verificationist procedures of the physical sciences supplying the final criterion of meaning. Our radical reflection has called into question the primacy of method, both on the philosophical and scientific level. Let us permit the phenomena to solicit the method rather than the method dictate the selection of the phenomena. The originaive phenomena in the study of man, the subject matter of any human science, is the dialogic encounter of self with other self. This dialogic encounter provides the originaive matrix of meaning-formations from which all theory construction proceeds and to which it needs to return. Our project of radical reflection has marked out the path for such a return. Following this path philosophy and the science of human communication can indeed be said to be talking about the same thing.

Notes

1. My most systematic efforts along these lines are contained in my book, Experience and Being, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969).
2. Essays in Radical Empiricism (New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1958), p. 170n.
3. "The Ambiguity of the Sciences of Man," Diotrephes, No. 26, 1959, p. 52.
4. "The Antinomy of Human Reality and the Problem of Philosophical Anthropology", in The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, ed. C.E. Reagen and D. Stewart (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 20.
5. Truth and Method (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), p.330.